

## Bangalore Bus Route No.16 in the 1950s



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I had [written earlier](#) how, in the 1950s, one travelled in Bangalore by BTS Route No. # 11 bus from Gandhi Bazaar to the Tata Institute of Science, Malleshwaram 18<sup>th</sup> Cross in a time slightly less than infinity.

That is only half the story.

From the same stop, started another bus, Route no. 16, which became an unofficial bridge between the City and Cantonment parts of Bangalore.

Unlike other buses, Route #16 had an air of authority and pomp for it took the inhabitants across the city to a place where the British stayed when they lorded over Bangalore. To a majority of citizens, Cantonment was *Dandu* in Kannada and 'Kantrumentru' for villagers.

To get the bus started on a cold morning, the driver had to repeatedly crank the engine with a steel rod, which would propel the engine with ear-piercing sounds, making scores of sparrows fluttering around old buildings in the vicinity go momentarily crazy.

Once the bus decided to move amidst plumes of smoke, the conductor, who relied on different type of whistles, one of which a wolf whistle, hopped in last.

The bus gingerly drove past Yuvaka Sangha, a society for youngsters for social activities. I remember the time while I was in school Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani had to abandon their speech in a hurry as the crowd at Yuvaka Sangha insisted they either speak in Kannada or in English! With the leaders not relenting and the crowd bent on having their way, the public meeting was abandoned even before the translator could translate *Bhayiyon aur Bhenon!* Those days Hindi was a very touchy subject with people feeling it was being thrust down the Southerner's throat; paradoxically everybody loved and hummed, Raj Kapoor's song from the movie Shree 420 song, '[mera joota hai Japani, yeh patloon Englistani.. sarpe laaltopi](#) or Lata's [Ae maalik tere bandey hum](#) from the movie [Do Aankhen baraa haath](#).

Our bus took a left turn on K.R. Road at the junction of the Basavanagudi Club and the only Taxi Stand in the suburbs which had old beaten-down Fords, Morris Minors and later, Ambassadors.

The Club, mainly for retired people, was open all through the day with members trooping in after morning *thindi* to play cards, rummy being their favourite game. Quite often, in the evenings one could see Jnanpeeth Award Winner Maasti Venkateha Iyengar ('Srinivasa') '*Karnataka's Aasthi – Maasti*' (Karnataka's jewel – Maasti) in his 80s walk in for a rummy session with his friends.

Our bus ambled along Basavanagudi Post office and Rayar Garage, whose owner Vajrappa offered his services as a driver, apart from servicing old Morris Minors. Fully suited, he also brought his own Hillman and drove newlyweds on a mandatory procession after their wedding!

Postmen from BPO walked down to distribute mail whereas 'Express Deliver' Postmen and Telegram delivery men rode red bicycles. The very appearance of these vehicles at the doorstep brought jitters to residents only to realise they brought happy tidings too, such as birth of a baby or a loved one returning from abroad.

The bus travelled at a speed that automatically transported its inhabitants to state of semi-sleepiness till they were disturbed by the conductor moving around shouting 'ticket, ticket' and cajoling passengers to move up to make way for standing passengers.

The first stop was at Vani Vilas Road, near my school, National High School Circle where a few people working in South Parade or Brigade Road got in. It was still early for students to assemble for their morning prayers – *yum brhama varunendra rudra maruthaha*, an invocation to the Gods.



*National High School*

As our bus neared Vasavi Kalyana Mantapa, ladies in Kanjeevaram saris and jasmine flowers were accompanying the bridegroom for 'Kashi Yathri' –a

ritual when the bridegroom was supposed to go for studies to Kashi (Varanasi), when the bride's father would appear from nowhere and offer his daughter for marriage!

Vasavi was a famous marriage hall for wealthy people. After the wedding, the couple was invariably taken on a drive amidst Petromax lights and live band with both sides of the family and their friends walking behind the car. The driver's ability to drive *slowly* was tested! The newlyweds, still awkward with each other, had some urchins sit between them!

Next, we drove past Shesh Mahal a famous landmark with lovely terracotta tiles on the top of the two-floor edifice with class. Shesh Mahal has now given way to a Glass and Chrome edifice with the Builder renaming it as Brigade Shesh Mahal!

It was still too early for the dentist Dr. Padmanabhan to open his clinic across the road.

Saraswati Vidyalaya came in next, with a chain of schools around Bangalore. The Founder, Mr. Srinivasa Sharma, was keen to have schools that imparted education to children at affordable cost. A near nonagenarian now, Sharma not only provided education but created jobs for women in an age not many were prepared to go out for work. That is a singular contribution in itself.

Towards the end of Vani Vilas Road to the left was a narrow serpentine road that led to the best bakery in town, V.B. Bakery in Sajjan Rao Circle. This road has now become *Thindi Beedi* (Snack Street), which is open late into the night.

Couple of elders got down to go to Lal Bagh, which along with Cubbon Park, functioned as the lungs that filtered out soot and dust from Bangalore's system. That pollution levels have increased to alarming levels now is not surprising, as the city has multiplied many times over!

Lal Bagh, developed by Hyder Ali, with its lovely lakeside bund, was ideal for long walks to go to one of the four observatories over a rocky hill constructed by Kempe Gowda, Chieftain of Bangalore between 1501-1570 CE. Gowda had erected four pillars around Bangalore serving as outer markers for the city. Film producers not keen to go and shoot in Brindavan Gardens, Mysore, would have their hero chase the heroine around trees in Lal Bagh to the strains of a blaring song with the crowd kept at safe distance by the police.

Instead of entering Lal Bagh, if you took a right and walked a couple of furlongs you came to Vijaya College under V.T. Srinivasan, the Principal who cast a spell in his classroom describing Mark Antony's funeral oration of Julius Caesar. Students from other colleges would sneak in to his classroom to watch him act out Shakespeare's characters. Prof. Srinivasan easily moved between Shakespeare and Pythagoras, for he was also a Mathematics teacher! Vijaya College in the suburbs was the first college that admitted ladies.

On the way to Vijay College, you saw the famous Ashoka Pillar, a prominent landmark even now. A reputed convent, 'Home School' was just about a stone throw from there, though throwing a stone anytime was never an option for its students!

Situated right at the Lal Bagh Circle was the Rashtriya Vidya College – R. V. College – whose Principal M.R. Srinivasa Rao, apart from his educational credentials, was one of the State's very good Table Tennis and Ball badminton players.

I am going all around Lal Bagh while still being seated in our bus crawling at a speed that would make a snail feel like Usain Bolt!

Now the bus drove through Krumbiegel Road, named after Gustav Hermann Krumbiegel, a German who designed Bangalore's Lal Bagh, and a major avenue of Bangalore. In 1908, the ruler of Mysore, Krishnaraja Wodeyar, appointed Krumbiegel as Economic Botanist and Superintendent of Lal Bagh. He introduced exotic plants and designed the famous Brindavan Gardens. Since Hitler then was not particularly liked, Krumbeigel was removed from his post his only fault being he was a German!

Kannada Rashtra kavi, Poet laureate, K.V. Puttappa, (Kuvempu) described the park thus in Kannada: *Devalayavee hoovina thotam* (This is a Temple of Garden) and *Idu sasya kaashi, kai mugiuu OLage baa* (This is a Botanical Temple; come in with all humility). This is displayed across an arch at both the gates of Lal Bagh.



MTR Restaurant

As the bus stopped at the South Gate of Lal Bagh, or the Main Gate, you were right at the doorstep of Sadananda Maiyya's Mavalli Tiffin Rooms –MTR, a most famous name among restaurants in India.

Some people got down here to have the luxury of walking in the garden as well as having breakfast at MTR. Advised by their doctors to exercise regularly, morning walkers would wait for MTR to open for their Idli and Vada after a spirited walk in Lal Bagh. When years of walking made no difference to their weight, the doctors knew what exactly the problem was!

It was perhaps the only restaurant in India where you waited in a Waiting Room before you were called out to eat your *Masala Dose* or *Puri Palya*. MTR who were in Mavalli road an adjacent lane shifted to this place and has never looked back. MTR's Lunch has so many items you would need couple of waiters to help you stand at the end of a lunchathon!

Pictures of Jawahar Lal Nehru, India's first President Babu Rajendra Prasad, and Last Governor General Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) adorn the walls of MTR. It is in Lal Bagh's Glass House that the Soviet Union's Bulganin and Khrushchev were once given a State banquet.

MTR made news for different reasons. They used to serve coffee, milk etc. in silver cups! After some burglary attempts, this was stopped.

Second, and more importantly, during the dark days of Emergency (1975-77), when Sanjay Gandhi tried to arm-twist hoteliers to sell *masala dose* at Re 1/ only, MTR refused. Instead, they placed advertisements in newspapers saying they would rather close than compromise on quality. They did close for a while, and reopened only when the Emergency was lifted. Along with Kishore Kumar and Hema Malini, MTR showed Vidya Charan Shukla, then I&B Minister, and Sanjay Gandhi that it was made of sterner stuff and would not compromise on its values!

Meanwhile our bus, meandering way through series of nurseries along Lal Bagh Road, came to the stop at Bangalore's first 'Double Road' in Shanti Nagar. With little lighting and looking deserted in the evenings, Double Road resembled roads you would come across in Agatha Christie's novels or similar novels in Kannada like M. Ramamurthy's spine chilling *Aparadhiya Atma Kathe*, *Yaravanu*, *BeraLillada Kai*.

Immediately after came the St. Joseph's College in Mission Road, before which the bus had to climb a steep gradient making so much noise that many awoke thinking an earthquake had hit the bus. In the intersection is the Woodland's Hotel, famous for South Indian snacks. Woodland's was famous for arranging marriages wherein you 'walked in as a boy and a girl'; the management arranged everything from a safety pin to giant size garlands and made sure you walked out as husband and wife.

Some passengers got down carrying huge boxes wrapped in coloured papers.

Next to the bus stop was the St. Joseph's hostel adjoining the Hockey Grounds.

The next stop was in Residency Road was where most children studying in Bishop Cotton and Baldwin's Girls schools got down as hunchbacks due to overload of books they carried!

Bishop Cotton School was established in 1865, named after Bishop George Edward Lynch Cotton. Some of the famous people who had studied in Bishop Cotton include the Bangalore-born cricketer Colin Cowdrey, General Thimmayya and Nandan Nilekani. The Baldwin's Girls school was established in 1880.

Our bus came to the fork at St. Mark's Road and Residency Road, where Bangalore's landmark chemist shop, the 'Cash Pharmacy', is situated. The shop was open round the clock and they also procured medicines from elsewhere during emergencies.

In St. Mark's Road stands one of Bangalore's finest clubs – Bowring Institute, which was established in 1868. Constructed amidst a sprawling area with greenery all around it has a colonial charm that still exists. In the evening, the vast foyer presents a meeting point for friends, businessmen and sportspersons to meet and have a meal over drinks.

Next door is India Garage, which was started in 1949 by Mahindra and Mahindra. This has become a major Service Centre and a well-known Petrol pump in Cantonment area.

As we passed the Koshy's, the aroma of freshly baked biscuits and croissants wafted across the road. Koshy's restaurant started in 1940, mainly as a bakery and later grew into a restaurant. It is still the best way to have coffee with biscuits in the Wodehouseian way of lazy afternoons melting into sunset.

Next came the king of Rosogullas, K.C. Das & Co. Das came out of Calcutta for the first time with Bengali Sweets and opened their shop in St. Mark's Road. Many more outlets have sprung up in Bangalore.

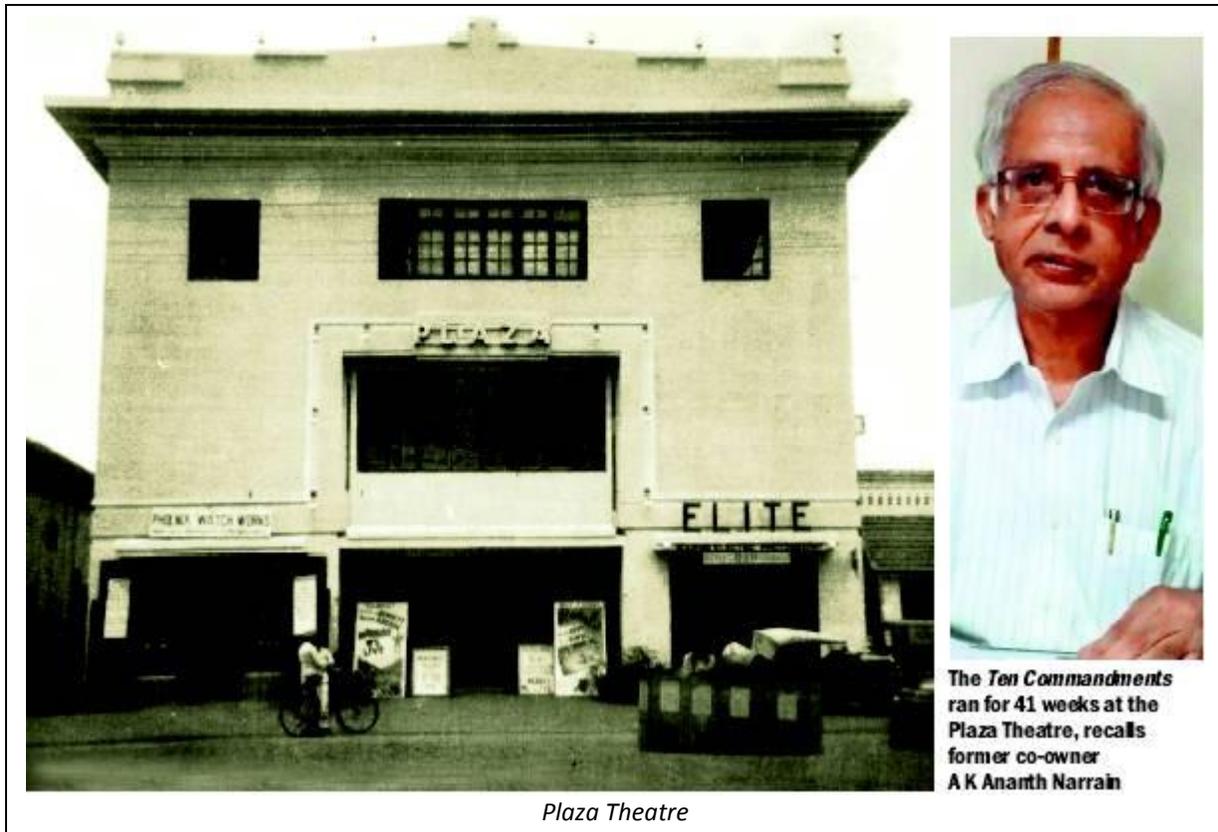
As the conductor announced 'M.G. Road', a hush fell on the bus. We have finally come to the *sanctum sanctorum* of Bangalore's showpiece in the cantonment.

Quite a few office goers, those who worked in the famous camera shops, theatres, and bookshops would get down at M.G. Road.

After tucking in freshly pressed shirts in to the trousers, city-bred students like me would get into a pair of Flex shoes, which we would have polished with Kiwi polish, till it shone brightly. Then, we would tip-toe around the pavements of M.G. Road, which was once called the South Parade. You would cross the finest camera shop in a cluster here, G.K. Vale, GG Wellings and EGK wherein you bought famous Kodak Camera with popping flash light bulbs. A housewife standing beside the seated husband next to a flower vase was one of the pictures that you would see in the studio!

Only if you belonged to the high society you, would get your glasses ground at Lawrence and Mayo, the famous optical shop who also sold telescopes survey equipment etc.

It's in M.G. Road that you watched famous movies such as *Gone With The Wind*, *Ten Commandments*, *Roman Holiday* and early James Bond movies at Plaza theatre. The Plaza theatre was razed down in 2005 but now the Metro will come there as 'Plaza Theatre Station'.



The owners of Plaza, Ananth Narrain's family, are descendants of Rao Bahadur Arcot Narayanaswami Modaliar, who built the High Court, Ataara Kacheri, opposite the present Vidhana Soudha. The then Commissioner of Mysore State, Lord Bowring decided to build these two buildings based on the drawings by Engineer Sankey (of Sankey Road and Sankey Tank in Malleshawaram). Narayanaswami Modaliar also started number of educational institutions in Cantonment area. The RBANM Society is still involved in number of philanthropic activities. Ananth Narrain was our neighbour in Coral Plaza Apartments in Fraser Town, where we stayed from 1996 to 2001.

M.G. Road was famous for hotels Breeze, Three Aces for its bar, restaurant and dancing with a live band. This was the place to be, especially on weekends.

Press baron K.A. Netakallappa moved his Deccan Herald and Kannada daily *Prajavani* from city. The Jains of Times of India also have now an office in M.G. Road.

Higginbotham's bookshop had young and old crowding for Sports and Pastime, Little Lulu comics, as well as serious detective novels like Agatha Christie. The India Coffee House is one of the oldest in M.G. Road where the best coffee in town with sandwiches was always available. You could have some of the finest ice creams in Lakeview.

Just opposite was the boulevard you walked amidst greenery as gentle breeze blew across M.G. Road. Opposite to M.G. Road across is Manekshaw Parade Ground, which was once called Brigade Parade Grounds.

At the intersection of M.G. Road and Brigade Road is Bangalore's Cauvery Emporium, where you bought anything from sandalwood articles to Mysore Silk saris. The Emporium showroom served as meeting point of office-goers and tourists. Sometime back, a fire destroyed most of the shop and goods, but, like a phoenix, it has risen in the same place now.

Further down on McGrath Road is the famous Police Sullivan Grounds, where many memorable hockey matches have been played between Hindustan Aircraft Ltd (HAL) and Madras Engineering Group (MEG), with India Internationals like Deshmuthu, Rajagopal, Manuel, Perter and Govinda.

Brigade Road is still the road to walk in Cantonment up to the Rex Theatre, where one saw *My Fair Lady* and James Bond movies. Brigade Road has always been a great shopping promenade for walking with shops on either side of the road.

For those from the City a walk in Brigade Road was the high point of the evening!

Chinnaswamy Cricket Ground was also close to M.G. Road. Among the many sixes Ajay Jadeja hit off Waqar Yunis, one came close to M.G. Road. In the next stop was Cubbon Road where there was BRV Theatre, which stands for Bangalore Rifles Volunteers.



*Cubbon Park*

After crossing Infantry Road (along with Artillery and Cavalry Roads, they formed the 'military Roads' in Cantonment!), Hospital Road which housed the Bowring Hospital, our bus ambled on

